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Google Chromecast (3rd Generation) review

The new Google Chromecast is fast and intuitive, but the attractive little dongle is behind the times.

By Marshall Honorof published October 28, 2022



Tom's Guide Verdict

The new Google Chromecast is fast and intuitive, but the attractive little dongle is behind the times.

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- + Fast performance
- Boring, stripped-down design
- + Inexpensive
- No significant improvements over second gen
- + Intuitive interface

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The Google Chromecast (3rd Generation) sits as the entry-level casting-only option in Google's streaming arsenal. It originally arrived without much hype from Google, and it's pretty easy to see why. One of the [best streaming devices](#) of its time, this Google Chromecast review will show how model is nearly identical to the second-gen [Google Chromecast](#) model from 2015, only it's a little faster.

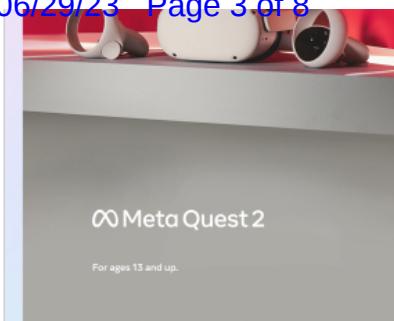
The 3rd gen Chromecast has also lost a very handy physical feature, and it has almost nothing to show to reflect three years of hardware advancement in the streaming space.

This Google Chromecast (3rd Generation) review will explain why it's still worthy, but know that Google's moved on. Check out our [Chromecast with Google TV 4K review](#) and our [Chromecast with Google TV HD review](#) to see the next generation.

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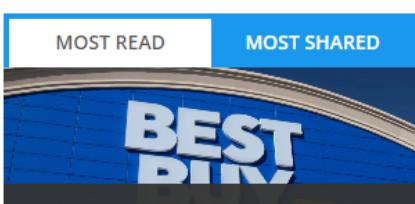
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- What is Google Chromecast?
- Google Chromecast 3 (Black) at Amazon for \$38.90

If you've got a 1080p TV kicking around in your kitchen or guest room, and the set doesn't have smart features built-in, the Chromecast is still one of the [best Google Home compatible devices](#) for inexpensively watching Netflix, Hulu, et al. on a big screen. Otherwise, Google's attractive little dongle is behind the times.

GOOGLE CHROMECAST (3RD GENERATION) SPECS

Ports: microUSB (power), HDMI (video out)
 Resolution: Up to 1080p
 Wi-Fi: 802.11ac (2.4GHz/5GHz)
 Measurements: 2 x 2 x 0.5 inches
 Weight: 1.4 oz

Google Chromecast (3rd Generation): Price and availability

The Google Chromecast costs \$30 and it's available practically everywhere, from Amazon to Best Buy, and (of course) Google.

Also, we've got our eyes on the rumored [Google Chromecast 4 'Sabrina'](#). Yes, that's an interesting code-name. More interestingly, it could ditch the whole Chromecast interface for Android TV. And it could work with a remote, something that the Chromecast never has before.

Google Chromecast (3rd Generation): Design

As before, the Chromecast is a circular dongle with a 2-inch circumference that attaches to the back of your TV. But now, instead of coming in a collection of vibrant colors with a cool, spiral design on the front, it comes in your choice of plain, boring black or plain, boring white. (It sports a rather tasteful little "G" logo, either way.)

On one side, there's a built-in HDMI cable, while the other hosts a micro USB port for power. (The Chromecast comes with both a micro USB cable and a power adapter, although you probably won't need the latter, unless you have a very, very old, USB-less TV.) There's also a button you can press for a hard reboot, although I never needed this.



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Because the Chromecast lives behind your TV, its physical design isn't all that important. But the device's latest edition did lose one of my favorite features: a small magnet on the HDMI cable that let you tuck the device neatly against itself. Now, the Chromecast dangles helplessly. This is probably not a big deal, although I wonder if gravity will stress the HDMI cable over time.

Google Chromecast (3rd Generation): Interface

The best reason to buy the Chromecast, as always, is that it has the simplest, easiest-to-understand interface of any streaming device on the market. That's because the Chromecast doesn't require you to learn a whole new OS or play around with an idiosyncratic remote control. Instead, you control the entire experience from your phone, tablet or computer.



By installing the Google Home app on your mobile device or by clicking the Cast option in a computer-based Chrome browser, you can simply "cast" whatever content you're watching onto your TV. This isn't a form of screen-mirroring. Instead, your phone is simply instructing the Chromecast to go pick up a signal directly from the content provider (Netflix, for example). This may seem like a subtle point, but true screen-mirroring requires daisy-chaining devices together and often results in a subpar experience.

Controlling the Chromecast is as easy as any given app makes it. For example, in Netflix, all you have to do is open the content you want to watch, press the Cast button and wait for your media to appear on your TV. From there, you can pause, play, fast-forward, rewind and adjust volume via your phone. The process is just as straightforward now as it was when the Chromecast debuted, but it's also quite a bit faster now.

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Google Chromecast (3rd Generation): Performance

The only significant difference that Google advertises between the third-gen Chromecast and its second-gen predecessor is better hardware. This is supposed to make the new gadget up to 15 percent faster than the old one.





Because 15 percent is not a night-and-day increase, and because the old device wasn't slow to begin with, this is not easy to test. So, I tried to evaluate the difference using a stopwatch, a general sense of what HD vs. SD resolutions look like, and a collection of videos on Netflix, Hulu and YouTube.

When I watched Thor: Ragnarok on Netflix, the movie took 11 seconds to start and 41 seconds to reach 1080p on the second-gen Chromecast, while the same film took 9 seconds to start and 41 seconds to reach 1080p on the third-gen device. That's a 20 percent difference in start time but only a 3 percent difference in optimization time.

The contrast in Hulu was a little more striking: 15 seconds to start, 20 to optimize on the second-gen machine and 9 seconds to start, 19 seconds to optimize on the third-gen machine. That's a 40 percent difference in start speed but only a 5 percent difference in optimization.

- [Best streaming services](#) - Netflix vs. Hulu vs. Amazon vs. HBO

It's a little bit harder to pinpoint resolution on YouTube, because a lot of content comes courtesy of phone cameras shooting under less-than-ideal lighting conditions. But videos from this service took 12 seconds to start on a second-gen Chromecast and 9 seconds to start on a third-gen version. That's a difference of 25 percent, still in excess of Google's claims.

If anything, Google undersold how much faster the new Chromecast is. But it's also worth pointing out that the very greatest difference I observed between the two models was 6 seconds. If you were to stream one video per day, that'd cost you about 37 minutes over the course of a whole year — almost enough time for an extra prime-time drama but not that much in the grand scheme of things

Although this is harder to quantify, colors also looked a little richer on the third-gen Chromecast, particularly the deep blacks and otherworldly blues in sci-fi films like Star Trek Beyond.

Of course, the color on the Chromecast isn't anywhere close to what you'd get with a 4K HDR device — which is, honestly, the route I was expecting Google would go. The [Chromecast Ultra](#) (\$70/£69) supports 4K HDR content, but that device's power-consumption specs make setup inconvenient. It's also now a bit expensive in comparison to other 4K HDR devices, like the [Roku Premiere](#) (\$40, or £60 for the closest specced model available in the UK).

In fact, the Chromecast's 1080p output is arguably its biggest weakness. While 1080p TVs still make up the majority of sets worldwide, their reign could come to an end [as early as next year](#). If you just bought a brand-new 4K smart TV, there's no reason to get a third-gen Chromecast for that set — and even if you didn't, it's better to spend the extra \$5-\$35 on something a little more future-proof.

Google Chromecast (3rd Generation): Search

Using the Google Home app, you can search for content across a few dozen

apps, including heavy hitters like Netflix, Hulu, YouTube and Vudu. The app does a pretty good job of directing you toward apps you already have installed on your phone or tablet. Google Home hardly approaches the subtlety of an [Apple TV](#) search (which can find movies based on Rotten Tomatoes ratings or TV shows based on a single, obscure guest star) or the breadth of a Roku search (which blazes through hundreds of different content providers). But it'll get the job done for ordinary TV and movies.

- The best [Netflix movies](#) are
- [5 Reasons You Should Pay for YouTube Premium](#)
- How to watch the [Marvel movies in order](#)

Google Chromecast (3rd Generation): Content and Apps

Because Chromecast released its SDK to the public a few years back, just about every major provider offers Chromecast functionality. Netflix, Hulu, YouTube, Pandora, Spotify, Vudu, [Sling TV](#) and the list goes on.



Chromecast owners with Amazon Prime Video have lived through the ordeal that Fire TV and Roku owners who wanted [HBO Max](#) endured in 2020. Yes, years ago, Amazon and Google spent forever negotiating to bring Amazon Video support to the Chromecast.

The only hassle left is that [Peacock](#) is still not on Fire TV, one of the more popular streaming services in America.

- The best [cable TV alternatives](#)

One nice thing about Chromecast is that Google's audiovisual apps have casting functionality built right in. If you want to display your Google Photos on a TV, listen to your Google Play Music, or show off your library of Google Play Movies and TV, all you have to do is open the app and press the Cast button. Most other streaming devices offer similar functionality, but there's usually a bit of tedious media-server setup involved. However, Google Play Music won't let you cast music from your personal collection — just stuff you've purchased through Google.

Google Chromecast (3rd Generation): Bottom line

The new Chromecast is a divisive streaming gadget. It's easy to like it for the intuitive interface and wide variety of content, and the speed improvement is noticeable. However, the new Chromecast doesn't innovate in any real way.

Overall, as this Google Chromecast review has shown, the latest edition feels behind the times, and it's lost one good feature along the way. But for \$35/£30,

it's still a very capable 1080p streaming gadget. Pick it up if you like the interface and have a full-HD TV that needs some love. Otherwise, your money is better spent on a 4K HDR device like the \$40 [Roku Premiere](#), which will provide better picture quality for a longer period.

Credit: Tom's Guide

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Marshall Honorof



Marshall Honorof is a senior editor for Tom's Guide, overseeing the site's coverage of gaming hardware and software. He comes from a science writing background, having studied paleomammalogy, biological anthropology, and the history of science and technology. After hours, you can find him practicing taekwondo or doing deep dives on classic sci-fi.

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